issue 43
streetcake

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lana bella

SMALL AND SMALLER

Inside her cupped hands sprouts a small universe. Inside this universe, another one lays smaller. It is not a bird that takes root, nor a mouse, rather a sharp question that presses its lips against moist skin, where ink notes leak into alphabets, incise through tiny beads of perspiration. Words churn this way and that, but they could not know, taking a turn back, to which their clusters of deformity would be the weight she would never regain. Instead, now they lay soft and yielding, and even if they were to step out off her hands, the air would grab hold of their whiskers-like-wings and carry them towards the edge of the unknown. So they will stagnate where deep whimpering drifts by in the universe, write up new letters as it has done before when she opens one hand and closes the other.

julia ciesielska

EUCHARIST MELTING IN HER THROAT
slow-mo final act
God as a witness
scratched her face
with a cutting edge of his eye

maybe she closed all windows
did not think of take-me-please urges
while turning the gas on
maybe she felt betrayed
by the little time left
made a clumsy farewell with a shoe collection
left needless worries
hastily ripped by gentle fingers

she got this country out of the sight
for good
an enemy dressed in muteness

a detective who took her case
wanted to touch that sadness
sheer and tulle
- she has never looked so elegant as did then

dane cobain

The Doctor Said

If you keep on writing poems,
you'll die before I do,
and you can't prescribe life
when your time runs out.

His handwriting's atrocious,
his intelligence quotient's
boastful,
and he knows the only hope
he has is broken.

I mention Amsterdam
and he looks at me
like a piece of dirt,
because I have mental health issues
that two spliffs and vlaamsefrites
are likely to exacerbate.

Mate,
what's the point in living
without a little self-destruction?

They say
a poem a day
keeps the doctor away,
but it also makes your brain ache
on cigarette breaks,
so he wrote me a new prescription
and asked me to leave
his office.

judith drazin

Wild Weather

At midnight,
the storm strikes
the quiet street, light
ening flashes and the trees
 denude, leaf after leaf,
illuminated
brief
ly in the flickering shine,
burnt orange, gold,
wine
red. A roof tile spins
 and in a crazy dance,
the bins,
utilitarian by day,
 advance, retreat advance.

rab ferguson

Sending a letter home

Even floating in
my own tin can the
stars still seem so
far away, tell David
Bowie that I'm not-

Through my porthole
window I see
billiard ball Earth
on glittered black
cloth, rolling from-

Imagine
emptiness
surrounds this
smooth metal
pebble in-

Drowning
under
nothing
and no
where I-

Can
you
still
hear
this-

jane frank

Wanted: A Poem Not About Missing Him

Not to be addressed: heartache, longing, loneliness.

Specific qualities not sought: lines about the slightly crooked way he smiles that melts your heart; bits that overemphasise how cute he looks in the photo he texted; and how desperately you want to make love.

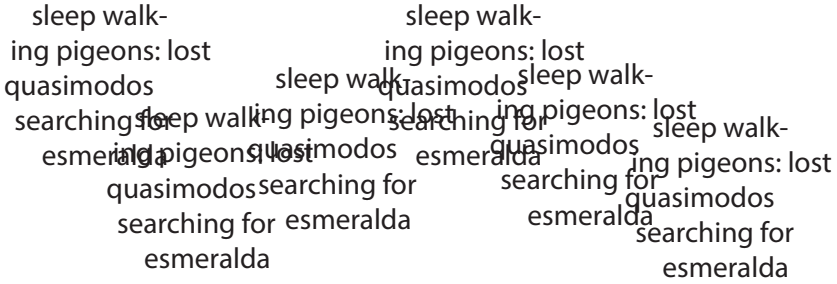
Preferred attributes: waxing lyrical about the beauty and stillness of the darkening garden, while drinking champagne and inhaling the scent of frangipani, no mention of distance, oceans or the ache of being apart; not indulging in repetitive rants about the agony of a lifetime of sleeping in different beds.

Essential aspects: a focus on positives including that there is a man of your dreams despite the fact you'll only see him once in a blue moon; lines that highlight the extreme romance of these encounters (usually on idyllic beaches, in rainforest canopies or on misty Caledonian islands) and how this more than makes up for anything that's not quite perfect; and the odd line about absence making the heart grow fonder.

Please note: frivolous poems will be favoured.

renior gaither

somnambulists



Baby

Louise was gone for three days. When she returned home, she was carrying a bundle in the crook of her arm.

"Where have you been all this time?" Theodore asked. "I was about to call the police."

"Oh, you silly thing!" Louise said. "Where do you think I've been? I've been giving birth to your son."

She lifted the corner of the blanket to show him the baby's face.

"This one has blue eyes," Theodore said.

"He has *your* eyes."

"My eyes are brown."

"I think I'm going to name him Nathaniel," she said. "After Hawthorne."

"Name him whatever you want."

"If I give him the name of a great writer, he might turn out to be a great writer himself."

"Uh-huh."

"You like that name?"

"It's as good as any other, I suppose."

She laid the baby down gently on the couch and took off her coat and laughed. "Believe me," she said. "It's not easy carrying a newborn baby home on the uptown bus. I had to stand up the whole way, holding the baby in one hand and trying to keep from falling with the other. You'd think a gentleman might have given me his seat, but nobody even noticed me."

"I could have come down and met you."

"Oh, that's all right," she said. "I managed perfectly fine. And, anyway, I wanted to surprise you. What do you think of our new son?"

"He's, uh…I can't seem to find the words. I'm speechless."

"I know! It's a shock, isn't it? Seeing him for the first time?"

"Especially since I didn't know he was expected."

"But that makes it that much more fun, doesn't it?"

"If you say so."

"Now, don't you be an old grump puss! I'm going to need lots of help from you with this baby. Feeding him, changing his diapers, bathing him, and all the rest of it."

"I don't think that baby is going to be any trouble at all," he said.

"No, of course not! He's such a good baby! I can tell already, as young as he is."

Theodore played piano in a jazz combo in a bar, so he had to leave to go to work. "Don't wait up for me," he said.

"Have a good time," she said, "and don't worry about me. The baby and I will be here when you get back."

With Theodore gone, Louise was glad to have some time alone with the baby. She carried him into every room in the apartment, talking to him all the while, even though she knew he didn't understand a word she said. She fed him, bathed him, and put him to bed in the crib at the foot of her own bed.

She slept until one o'clock, at which time she got up and fed him again. After she put him back in his crib and got back into bed, she had trouble going back to sleep. She kept thinking about how Theodore didn't seem very happy about the

baby. Well, men, she thought. You can't ever tell what they're thinking or how they really feel. They keep it all bottled up inside.

At two o'clock she still hadn't gone back to sleep. She got up and checked on the baby and when she saw he was sleeping peacefully she knew the problem wasn't with the baby but with her. She was lonely and sad. She picked up the sleeping baby and put him in the bed beside her. After that she was able to go to sleep.

Theodore came home about three-thirty. He undressed quietly and got into bed and after he had lain there a couple of minutes Louise began to cry.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"I'm not going to have any more children," she said.

"Okay."

"I don't think you love them."

"Could we postpone this conversation to another time? I'm very tired."

"Take Nathaniel and put him with the others. They need to get acquainted."

"I just got into bed. Can't you do it?"

"You're the father."

He sighed and got out of bed again without turning on the light. He picked Nathaniel up by the neck and carried him out of the room and down the hallway to another room. In this room was a bed with six lifelike plastic dolls lying side by side, all exactly like Nathaniel. He added Nathaniel to the collection and went back to bed.

"Better now?" he asked Louise.

"Yes."

"And this is going to be the last one?"

"Yes, I think so. Seven is my lucky number."

mark russell

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the form of it
the head of it

the rush the tumble the grope for light
the stasis of it
the static in it
the staunching the parting
the weary end of it